Alternative Communications

Issues and Strategies for People with Alternate Communication Needs

September 1992

THE PREMIER'S COUNCIL
ON THE STATUS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES
Alberta

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Executive Summary

Individuals who, because of age, level of literacy, mental, physical or learning disability are unable, without assistance, to fully access services which would otherwise be available to them, or to understand or be understood by service providers, have alternate communication needs.

The means by which these needs are met include the use of alternatives to print such as audiotape or Braille; communication assistance from sign language interpreters; and communication technology like computer synthesized speech and print enlargement.

At the present time, the Government of Alberta does not have policies that address communication access for those with alternate communication needs. This document provides background information, lists issues to be resolved, and makes recommendations to government departments in five areas:

1. **Government** - access to information from government documents; exchange of information at public meetings and services;

2. **Justice System** - access to fair treatment in the justice system;

3. **Educational Resources** - access to appropriate educational materials and adequate levels of service in education and post-secondary education;

4. **Sign Language Interpreters** - access to qualified interpreters; and

5. **Communication Technology** - access to adaptive communication technology.

Access to government information and services (No. 1 above) is the issue of most urgent concern because it affects the greatest number of people. Therefore, the committee developed extensive proposed policy statements and implementation guidelines to speed up implementation. These proposed policy statements and guidelines are attached as Appendix 1.

Summary of Recommendations

1.1 Implementation of a policy to provide access, through alternate means, to the information in government publications, public meetings and services for all Albertans, beginning in 1993.

2.1 Development and implementation of a policy to guide the actions of the police, the courts and the correctional system in meeting the alternate communication needs of people who come in contact with the justice system, beginning in 1993.

3.1 Expansion of the mandate of the Materials Resource Centres to include all school age students who would benefit from materials in alternate formats, by the 1993-94 school year.

3.2 Negotiation of an agreement by which post-secondary institutions will be able to access some or all of the services of the Materials Resource Centres or through a parallel service, by the 1994-95 academic year.

3.3 Resolution of the access barriers to books in alternate formats directly from publishers, by 1994.

4.1 Establishment of at least two community agencies that will serve a central referral function with respect to interpreter and other communication services for the province, by 1993.

4.2 Implementation of a consultation process to resolve issues of communication support for deaf and hard of hearing students in Alberta schools, beginning in 1992.

4.3 Expansion of the interpreter training program at Grant MacEwan Community College, in 1993.

5.1 Removal of inconsistencies within the Aids to Daily Living Program (AADL) with respect to the current provision of communication technology, by 1993-94 fiscal year.

5.2 Plan for expansion of the benefits under AADL to include communication technology for people with disabilities that affect communication, in 1993-94.

What is being sought with the above recommendations is a further removal of barriers to full participation by people with alternate communication needs.

The preparation of this document involved considerable consultation with stakeholders in government and the community and has the support of those who participated in the process.

Acknowledgements

The Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities is indebted to many groups and individuals who participated in the development of this document. As with all of our work, the issues in this paper are more complex than we first imagined and it will be the spirit in which solutions are implemented that matters, as much as the policies themselves.

We wish to thank all those who have raised our awareness of the issues, including the community consultation participants listed in Appendix 3, and all those who took the time to respond in writing.

The advisory group members, who committed their valuable time and knowledge to the development of solutions, are as follows:

Harold Brown, Alberta Public Works, Supply and Services

Don Dawson, Alberta Attorney General (Personnel Services)

Lesley Gronow, Alberta Attorney General (Communications)

Ruth Hofer, Alberta Solicitor General

Neil Marshall, Alberta Association of the Deaf and Premier's Council Member

Audrey Matheson, Canadian National Institute for the Blind

Jim McClellan, Education Response Centre

Miriam Schnellert, Canadian Council of the Blind

Jane Simmons, Alberta Public Affairs Bureau

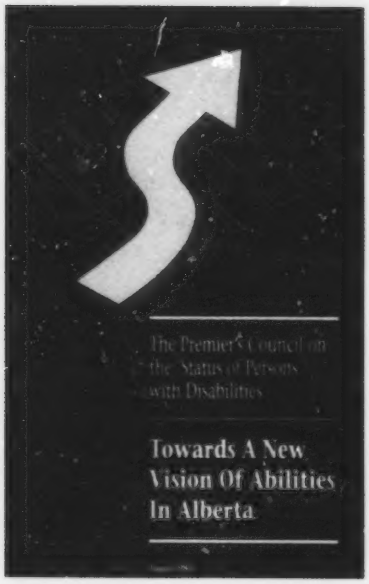
Ralph Westwood, Alberta Advanced Education

Beverly Williamson, Canadian Hard of Hearing Association

We are most grateful to these people for their wisdom and insight, patience and understanding, and for their support.

Finally, we would like to say a special word of thanks to Dr. Jerome Schein, who has occupied the first David Peikoff Chair of Deafness Studies at the University of Alberta for the last three years. He has advocated, and educated, tirelessly on behalf of people who are deaf and hard of hearing. As he leaves Alberta, it should be with the knowledge that he has made a difference.

Towards a New Vision of Abilities in Alberta



In 1989, the Premier's Council articulated a vision for the future of people with disabilities in Alberta. That vision saw a shift in focus:

- **from the limitation to the person;**
- **from the disability to the ability;**
- **from charity and pity to individual right and responsibility;**
- **from a concept of costs to one of investment;**
- **from institutional living to community living.**

These shifts will ultimately result in full integration and acceptance of people with disabilities as full participants in the life of Alberta.

Government policy goes hand in hand with public perceptions of the value or worth of individuals, and therefore must encompass not only social and economic perspectives, but a citizenship perspective - a commitment to equality for all Albertans.

The subject matter of this document, alternative forms of communication, does not have the high degree of visibility associated with physical accessibility, but it is no less important. In the paper, we attempt to raise awareness of the issues associated with communication disabilities and to describe strategies that will move us closer to the vision of full participation.

As in all of the Council's work, the test of a position or recommendation is its adherence to the Council's principles:

- **Equal status, personal contribution and inherent worth**
- **Equity of opportunity**
- **Individual responsibility and personal control**
- **Opportunity for full participation in community life**
- **Consumers as consultants**

What we are seeking is a further removal of barriers to full participation for those individuals who require alternate forms of communication.

Background

Government communicates with Albertans in numerous ways about policies, programs and events. However, the Alberta government has no policy about access to services and information by people with alternate communication needs. The purpose of this document is to identify the issues and solutions in this important area.

The ability to communicate is essential if people are to give and receive information, and the main methods of communication are through print and speech. People who are unable to hear the spoken word or see the written word do not have access to much of the information that comes to the rest of us daily. Information from television or newspapers;

announcements and notices in public places; participation in public meetings, cultural, and recreational events are just some of the areas of restricted access for those with vision and/or hearing loss. Moreover, many face significant barriers to education, advanced education, recreation and employment because of their alternate communication needs.

Tables 1 and 2 give figures on the prevalence of visual and hearing impairment in Alberta. These are estimates, based on the 1986-87 Health and Activity Limitation Survey (HALS). Roughly half are people over 65 years of age and the rest are between 15 and 64 years of age. In addition, the Education Response Centre identified 1,413 children in the school system with impaired hearing in 1989-90.

The HALS survey was repeated in 1990-91. Unfortunately, those figures were not available at the time of printing of this document. The categories of moderate and severe impairment are those used by HALS and were derived from the data, not stated by respondents.

Table 1

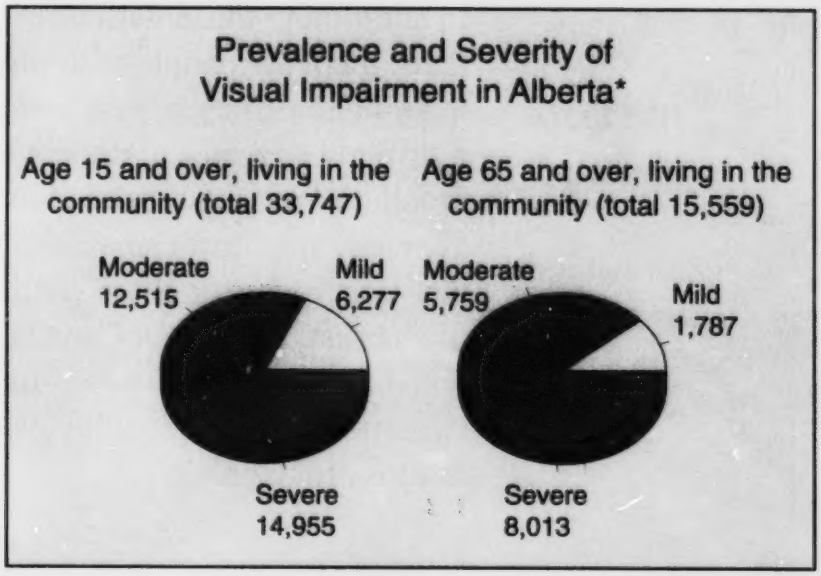
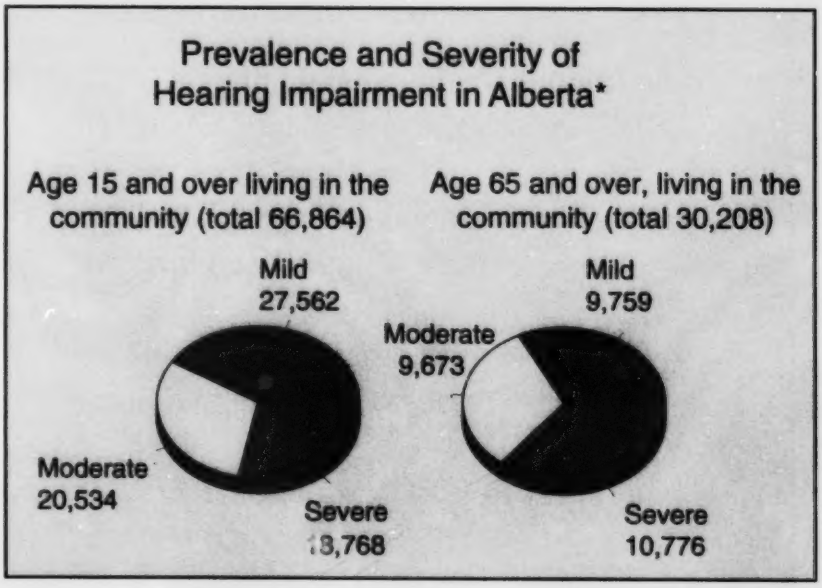

Prevalence and Severity of
Visual Impairment in Alberta*
Age 15 and over, living in the community (total 33,747)
Moderate 12,515
Mild 6,277
Severe 14,955
Age 65 and over, living in the community (total 15,559)
Moderate 5,759
Mild 1,787
Severe 8,013

Table 2


Prevalence and Severity of
Hearing Impairment in Alberta*
Age 15 and over living in the community (total 66,864)
Mild 27,562
Moderate 20,534
Severe 18,768
Age 65 and over, living in the community (total 30,208)
Mild 9,759
Moderate 9,673
Severe 10,776

*Source: Health and Activity Limitation Survey, 1986-87

In addition to those with hearing and vision problems, there are people with physical restrictions, learning disability or low levels of literacy that make it difficult to read and understand books, forms, brochures and other printed materials. Those affected range from small children to seniors. Table 3 shows figures on the potential market for materials in alternate formats in Canada and includes people who have disabilities other than hearing or vision. Alberta figures are roughly estimated to be about 9% of those for Canada.

Most of the barriers to communication can be removed through better understanding of how to remove them through the use of low level technology.

Table 3

Potential Market for Alternate Format Materials in Canada

Using the Health and Activity Limitation Survey and American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) findings, the following gross estimates have been calculated by the National Library of Canada:

325,797 print handicapped Canadians (AFB estimates that 1.3% of population has severe reading disability)

244,347 print handicapped readers (AFB estimates that 25% never read)

63,530 disabled talking book users (26% of print handicapped readers)

61,086 disabled large print users (25% of print handicapped readers)

12,217 Braille users (5% of print handicapped readers)

Identification of Issues

In 1989, a sub-committee was established by the Premier's Council to report on issues for deaf and hard of hearing people. The CNIB also submitted a substantial report detailing issues for people who are blind or have low vision. As well, many individuals and other organizations have addressed communication issues in submissions to the Council.

For purposes of this document, the communications needs and concerns of people with disabilities fall into five categories:

1. **Government** - access to information from government documents; exchange of information at public meetings and services;

2. **Justice System** - access to fair treatment in the justice system;

3. **Educational Resources** - access to appropriate educational materials and adequate levels of service, in education and post-secondary education;

4. **Sign Language Interpreters** - access to qualified sign language interpreters; and

5. **Communication Technology** - access to adaptive communication technology.

The Premier's Council made recommendations in its 1990 Action Plan that were intended to influence the area of communication needs: improved training of sign language interpreters; additional technology from Alberta Aids to Daily Living to facilitate access to information; and better commitment to the provision of support services to students in post-secondary institutions.

The Council is aware that this was not enough to address the range of issues and has created this document to give priority to the area of alternative forms of communication for people with disabilities.

Consultation Process

Issues were collated from reports and letters received by the Council that related to communication needs. The information was summarized and circulated to 110 individuals and organizations in our database that were identified as having an interest in the concerns of people with sensory disabilities. People were asked to indicate if the issues were still relevant and to add any that were not included. Thirty-two replies were received, many providing additional information about the identified issues, but few new issues were raised.

An advisory committee was formed in November 1991, consisting of representatives from six government departments and four community agencies. All community representatives have

disabilities that result in them having alternate communication needs.

A series of committee meetings was held to discuss the issues and develop recommendations to provincial government departments.

Once a discussion document was ready, two public consultation meetings were held: one each in Edmonton and Calgary. Stakeholders outside these cities were sent the paper by mail for comment.

The consolidated Edmonton-Calgary feedback was used by the advisory committee to revise the paper. The revised paper was returned to the Edmonton and Calgary stakeholders. Another meeting was held in each city to further refine the paper.

The members of the Premier's Council received, reviewed and approved the document in June 1992.

Each of the following chapters focuses on one of the five issue areas. Within each chapter there is an introduction containing background information on the particular area; a list of points highlighting why change is needed; and one or more recommendations directed to specific agencies or departments of government.

With respect to the first issue, access to government information and services, proposed policy statements and guidelines were also developed by the

committee and these are contained in Appendix 1. The intent was to set the desired direction for these policies so that implementation could be accomplished within a short time frame. There are some areas where it is indicated that further consultation will be required to finalize the specifics.

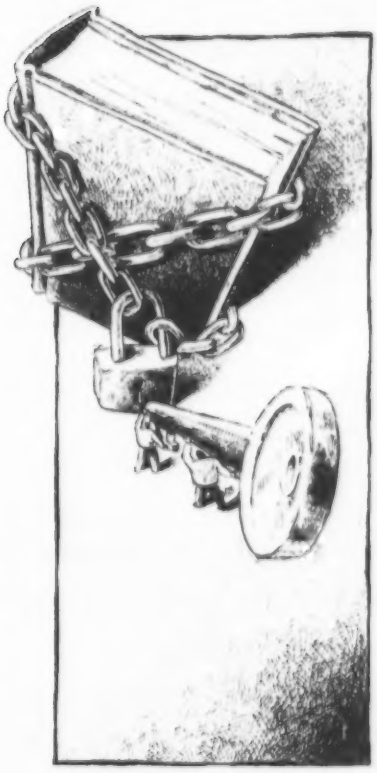
The committee members did not believe that they had the expertise to do initial policy development for the other issues, and so have left this to relevant departments.

A Glossary of Terms can be found in Appendix 2 that explains many of the terms related to alternative communication needs.

Government

Introduction

Government produces numerous printed documents each year, many of which are available to members of the public. These documents consist of reports, brochures, notices and forms and they can provide a wealth of information, if individuals are able to see, read and understand the information.



Unfortunately, many people are print handicapped by visual, physical, learning and other disabilities, and therefore cannot make use of this information in printed form. Most of them could make use of the information if it was available in another format, such as audiotape, Braille, computer accessible format, or large print.

Information which is meant to be heard is similarly inaccessible to people who are deaf or hard of hearing. This includes film or video productions if they do not have subtitles. This lack of access to information results in missed opportunities, misunderstandings and isolation. People are often unaware of public meetings because they cannot see or hear announcements. They do not learn of services that might be helpful and often have difficulty accessing services because the

staff they come into contact with are not sensitive to the need for extra care in communication.

The complex language of government is also a factor in reducing access to information for many people, whether disabled or not. The Government of Alberta recently announced the development of a policy that will require the use of "plain language" in government writing. There is a plan to implement this policy in stages, beginning in 1992 with letters written to the public, then moving on to applications and other forms in 1993 and adding other types of documents each year until 1996. This is a very positive move and will be welcomed by the general public. However, it will not solve the access problems for people with alternate communication needs.

Why Change is Needed

- People who are unable to access print material because of a disability are denied access to government information that is available to all other citizens.
- The information in films and videos prepared by government to provide training or information is often inaccessible to deaf and hard of hearing people.
- Public meetings sponsored by government are inaccessible if people cannot learn of their

existence or cannot participate because their communication needs have not been met.

- Publicly funded services are not available to some people without communication assistance, and service providers have not taken responsibility for providing this assistance.

Recommendation

1.1 The Legislative Assembly and all government departments and agencies will implement a policy to provide access to the information in government publications, public meetings and services by all Albertans. Proposed policy guidelines are contained in Appendix 1, "Proposed Policy on Communication Access."

The Public Affairs Bureau, as the central communications agency of government, will take responsibility for the refinement, if any, of these policy statements, the development of standards and mechanisms to ensure production quality, and begin implementation of these policies by April, 1993.

Development of standards for production and distribution of materials will involve consultation with "user" experts in the community.

The Public Affairs Bureau has as its mission to provide "effective communication between the

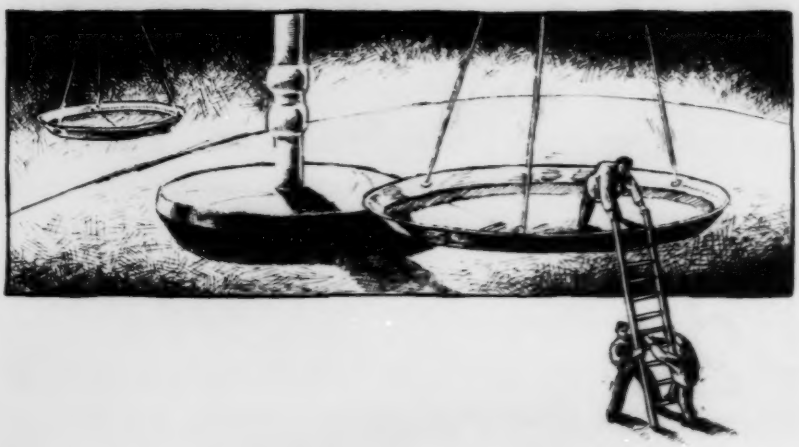
Government of Alberta and its publics...". The way the Bureau is structured and the role that it has in helping government departments with production of print documents, films and other communication tools seems to make it a logical choice to accept responsibility for the implementation of the proposed policies.

Justice System

Introduction

People with alternate communication needs are those individuals who, because of any type of disability, are unable to fully access the justice system or understand or be understood by officials of the system without alternate communication approaches. The justice system is made up of the police, the courts, and corrections (jail and parole).

The Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Individual's Rights Protection Act (IRPA), and the Alberta Bill of Rights all offer protection against discrimination and legal recourse if it does occur. This right cannot be upheld for people with alternate communication needs unless those needs are adequately met. This means that careful attention must be paid by police, the courts and the corrections



system to early identification of these communication needs and quick and appropriate response.

An individual may come into contact with the justice system in several ways: accused of a crime, a witness to a crime, or the victim of a crime. In all cases, it is necessary to ensure that communication difficulties do not prevent justice from occurring.

Nova Scotia and Manitoba have each developed and adopted a protocol for the investigation and prosecution of cases involving people with alternate communication needs. The intent of the protocol is to ensure that a victim or witness receives the communication support that is most appropriate to the need during interviews, while giving evidence, or receiving information, but does not include people accused of crimes.

On a national level, the proposed Omnibus Bill (Canadian Disability Rights Council, 1991) suggests changes to the Canada Evidence Act to accommodate the needs of people with alternate communication needs.

In Alberta, there are gaps and inconsistencies in the assistance available. An explicit policy would define and clarify when and how communication assistance must be provided.

Why Change is Needed

- People with alternate communication needs who are charged with crimes must be given the same opportunities as other citizens to understand the charges, receive counsel and support, and understand any proceedings involving the police, courts or corrections.

- If placed in jail, people with alternate communication needs must have their communication needs met in order to access safety, therapy, education or any other activities normally available to inmates.

- People with alternate communication needs are often not seen as reliable witnesses to give evidence regarding a crime where they have been the victim or a witness. This is because they may not be familiar with the proceedings, or what is being asked of them, without communication assistance. There needs to be better preparation of these witnesses by the legal system.

- Testimony or evidence needs to be gathered in a non-threatening manner, using the supports most appropriate to the individual, e.g., sign language interpreter, intervenor, advocate or support person who is familiar with the individual, assistive listening devices.

- Most communication problems can be overcome with the appropriate support, but it must be given

in a timely fashion, and in a manner that is acceptable to the individual.

- It is a violation of an individual's rights to the protection of the law if reasonable efforts are not made to aid communication that will allow the individual to lay charges and/or give evidence. People with disabilities who suffer abuse have particular difficulty receiving the support needed with the result that abusers are rarely charged.

Recommendation

2.1 The Department of Solicitor General and the Department of Attorney General will take the lead, but will involve community stakeholders and other departments as necessary, to develop a policy to guide the actions of police, the courts and the corrections system in meeting the alternate communication needs of people who come in contact with the justice system.

This work should be completed and in place by the end of 1993.

Issues that will need to be addressed include, but are not limited to the following:

- identification of the types of communication assistance that can be provided;

- identification of the qualifications, roles and functions of individuals providing communication assistance;

- where and when audio-tape and/or video-tape may be used to record interviews or testimony, and what uses may be made of this information;

- confidentiality of TDD communications;

- what constitutes "reasonable" efforts to meet an individual's communication needs;

- consistency between guarantees under anti-discrimination laws and Alberta law; and

- access to services associated with the justice system, e.g., Legal Aid, victim assistance services (police), counselling and treatment (corrections).

Once the policy is in place, the issue of staff training will need to be addressed. Training is needed to increase awareness of how to interact appropriately with people who have alternate communication needs, and of the potential for isolation of the deaf or blind person in jail.

Educational Resources

Introduction

In response to advocacy by parents of children with visual disabilities, Alberta Education established the Materials Resource Centre (MRC) with one branch in Edmonton and one in Calgary. These centres produce curriculum materials in Braille, large print and audiotape for children in preschool to grade 12 identified by consultants as unable to benefit from regular printed material. Schools receive these materials at no cost but their use is limited to children with visual disabilities. Users expressed satisfaction with the MRC service.

Equipment to facilitate access to curriculum and other materials (e.g., library books) is also available. Large print typewriters, closed circuit TV magnifiers (e.g., Visualtek) and computer equipment to convert print into Braille or voice can be provided, although cost may limit availability.

In British Columbia, access to material in alternate formats is not limited to children with visual disabilities, but is available to children with other communication needs as well. Initially, the

demand for audiotape materials was so high that a small fee per tape was introduced. This had the effect of substantially reducing demand by schools.

Students in post-secondary programs do not have access to a centralized source of materials in alternate formats. Each institution does its best to provide the necessary assistance to its students, but, unlike the curricula for primary and secondary school, there is no standard curriculum for post-secondary students. Production of textbooks in alternate formats is a particular problem because of the time it requires. The answer to this dilemma is clearly to convince publishers to sell texts on computer disk so they could be easily translated into large print, Braille or voice output. Audiotape format would still be time consuming to produce because the text must be read onto tape.

Post-secondary institutions do not limit the use of material in alternate formats to students with particular disabilities. Instead, they try to accommodate the unique needs posed by the disability of any student. Removing this function to a central location for all post-secondary students might create problems, rather than solving them. However, there would be value in a provincial "centre of expertise" from which advice and assistance could be obtained to facilitate the development of local solutions to student needs.

Where post-secondary institutions offer regular high school courses (not "equivalencies") to adult students, curriculum materials in alternate formats are available from MRC.

Why Change is Needed

- In the school system, curriculum materials in alternate formats are only available to students with vision disabilities, even though many other students could benefit from this assistance.
- The needs of students with learning disabilities in the K-12 school system are accommodated for examinations through the use of tape recorders, extra time and other changes. Their needs for materials in alternate formats are not necessarily met during instruction.
- Certain equipment to aid students with visual impairments in elementary and secondary school is provided by a central source (MRC) where there is knowledgeable staff. This kind of expertise is not available for equipment to assist hard of hearing students. Each school must develop its own expertise, which may be lost when students and/or personnel change.
- The greatest need identified by both education and post-secondary education is for training of teachers and students to make good use of equipment and software available to assist them with their communication needs.

- While it may be time-efficient for post-secondary institutions to continue meeting the communication needs of students locally, there are no other options at this time. Expertise that is developed by larger institutions is not easily available to smaller institutions that have fewer resources to meet student needs.

- Post-secondary institutions do not guarantee admission to all applicants, unlike elementary and secondary education. However, once accepted, students with disabilities should be guaranteed the supports needed to participate. There is no clear policy on this issue from the post-secondary system.

Recommendation

3.1

Alberta Education will expand the mandate, funding and staffing of the Materials Resource Centres to include all school age students who would benefit from materials in alternate formats, regardless of the nature of the disability.

The role of MRC as a centre of expertise and provider of technical equipment will also be enhanced in two ways: to include equipment (mainly assistive listening devices) used by students who are hard of hearing; and to provide the training to students and teachers in the use of these technological aids.

Exploration of these changes should begin immediately so that, at a minimum, the MRC will serve the needs of all students in schools who need curriculum materials in alternate formats by the 1993-94 school year.

3.2 Alberta Advanced Education and Alberta Education will negotiate an agreement by which post-secondary institutions will be able to access some or all of the following services from the MRC or through a parallel service:

- alternate format production services for post-secondary level materials;
- consultation in areas of MRC expertise; and
- training in the use of technological equipment.

This will mean a further expansion of the mandate of the MRC and will require a long term commitment from Advanced Education to support the development of these services. This agreement will be in place for the 1994-95 academic year.

3.3 Alberta Education, Advanced Education, Culture and Multiculturalism, and other relevant bodies within government will step up their work with other provinces, the National Library of Canada and the Canadian Braille Authority to influence book publishers to use the technology available to solve the problem of access to books in alternate formats.

The best solution for people with print handicaps, especially for books in alternate formats, must ultimately involve publishers who can provide easier access either through sale of computer accessible versions of books that can be readily converted into Braille, large print or voice output, or through provision of alternate formats themselves.

The technology is available now. Other barriers to access need to be removed by 1994.

The National Library of Canada has obtained program funding to encourage publishers to invest in equipment that will make this conversion possible at minimal cost. Money has also been made available to assist public libraries to purchase equipment that will make existing print materials accessible to people with visual impairments. These programs are a start but, by themselves, are not enough.

Sign Language Interpreters

Introduction

A sign language interpreter is a professionally trained individual who provides interpreting services between Deaf, hard of hearing and hearing persons. The working languages in Canada are ASL, English, French and LSQ (French sign). It is a fairly new occupation with a recent history of recognized training and evaluation of its members.

Only a few training programs exist in Canada, one of which is available at Grant MacEwan Community College (GMCC) in Edmonton. Fifteen students are admitted to the 10 month program each year, and the majority of these graduate to become interpreters. A proposal has been presented to Alberta Advanced Education to expand this program into a two year diploma program. When the new GMCC campus is completed in 1993, this program is proposed for expansion, but it is not guaranteed at this time.

The availability of qualified interpreters may be somewhat limited by the shortage of basic training programs, but there is an urgent need for advanced and specialized training of interpreters, especially

for work in education, post-secondary education, medical and legal settings. Funding that would allow the employment of qualified interpreters is also an issue in some settings.

At the present time, there is no requirement in Alberta for individuals working as sign language interpreters to have specific training or certification prior to employment. The Association of Visual Language Interpreters of Canada (AVLIC), in consultation with organizations of the Deaf, developed and introduced the Canadian Evaluation System in 1990 to evaluate the skills of sign language interpreters. It is a two phase test, encompassing a written component and a skill component. AVLIC is working towards having this certification become a requirement nationally for employment as an interpreter, with one province having already adopted the standard to be achieved over a 5 year period.

Why Change is Needed

- Schools are one of the largest employers of sign language interpreters, yet many of the approximately 137 people employed in this role have little or no formal training, and no certification of competence. There are fewer than 100 qualified interpreters in the province - not enough to fill these positions, plus meet the demand in other settings.

- Many of the jobs in schools do not pay enough to attract fully qualified interpreters.

- There is often no one within the school who is able to supervise and evaluate performance of interpreters, and the children who are consumers of the service lack the experience to evaluate it.

- Deaf students at post-secondary institutions may not have adequate access to interpreters knowledgeable in the wide range of subject areas. Interpretation of complex material in lectures requires knowledge of the concepts and related vocabulary.

- The role and responsibilities of interpreters are not well understood by those who hire them, particularly in the education system. The result is that expectations of what an interpreter will do can go beyond the boundaries of their Code of Ethics. Also, interpreters are not trained to do many of the "extra" things they are asked to do, such as teaching and evaluating student performance.

- Without a system of evaluation and supervision, and a means of matching skills with job demands, employers of interpreters are unable to ensure a quality service.

- Getting a qualified interpreter when the need arises is problematic for many agencies (schools, police, hospitals) since they are not familiar with this service. Long delays may occur and the result may be unsatisfactory to the Deaf person and agency alike.

- Current training program for interpreters is too short: the number of graduates is too small; and the skill level of new graduates is too low for entry level positions.

Among Deaf people, parents of Deaf children, and interpreters there was a clear distinction made between the issues in educational interpreting and community interpreting (all other settings). These recommendations reflect that distinction.

Recommendation

4.1 In collaboration with the Deaf community and interpreter organizations in Alberta, Advanced Education, Career Development and Employment, and Family and Social Services, as the current funders of interpreter services, will provide funding to develop and support the operation, by 1993, of a minimum of two community agencies, north and south. These two agencies will have responsibility and resources to meet interpreting and communication needs in cities and rural areas, and a mandate to

support developing services in towns and small cities.

The primary focus will be to provide interpretation and other communication services, not including educational communication services.

These services will be operated by community agencies, not government departments, and would have at least three functions:

- to provide qualified interpreters as requested in a way that optimizes availability across the province,
- to provide supervision and evaluation of interpreting services, and
- to provide a basis for developing improved services and predicting future needs.

The services of interpreters and other communication assistance would be purchased from the agency by the user of the service (e.g., government departments, the courts, police, hospitals, colleges, etc.) on a fee-for-service basis.

A model for this kind of service agency exists at Calgary Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services.

4.2 In recognition of the complexity of issues surrounding interpreters in the educational system, including their qualifications and duties, Alberta Education and the Premier's Council will initiate a consultation process involving interpreters, educators, Deaf people and parents. This will begin in 1992.

The purpose would be to resolve issues of communication support like the following, in order to provide a quality and responsive service:

- what educational situations require the services of a qualified interpreter rather than a teacher aide who provides communication assistance (sometimes referred to as a communication aide);
- the employment relationship between interpreter and student/teacher/principal, and others within the school;
- supervision and evaluation of interpreters and other providers of communication assistance;
- training and support for interpreters and other providers of communication assistance;
- training for students and teachers in how to use interpreters effectively; and
- completeness of service guidelines that specify when and what must be interpreted within the school setting or as part of a school activity.

This recommendation is taken directly from the 1990 Premier's Council Action Plan, page 12:

4.3 "Alberta Advanced Education to support and enhance the training of sign language interpreters to increase the number of interpreters, and to improve their skill levels to meet the needs of people who are deaf, particularly in the educational arena."

This recommendation has been put on hold by Advanced Education, pending the completion of the new Grant MacEwan Community College campus, but there are no guarantees that the existing program will be expanded at that time either.

If the other recommendations in this document are to be implemented successfully, it is imperative that the interpreter training issues receive immediate attention.

Communication Technology

Introduction

There are numerous kinds of technological devices designed to assist people with alternate communication needs. These can range from a magnifier to increase print size to a computer that converts print to Braille or voice; from a hearing aid or amplifier telephone to a, machine that converts telephone signals to text.

When vision or hearing is impaired to the extent that it interferes with daily activities, a technological solution may still provide the level of independence that others enjoy, but sometimes at significant cost to the individual. There are two ways to overcome this obstacle: through government funded programs and through private sector initiatives.

While the private sector is often the leader in development and refinement of technology, it is not in the business of giving innovations away. However, there have been some attempts to acknowledge the needs of people with disabilities:

- AGT can provide large button telephones to assist people with low vision or an amplifier handset to people who are hard of hearing.

- Rogers Cable Systems, which operates in Ontario, British Columbia and parts of Calgary in Alberta, is offering television decoders to deaf people for a $25 refundable deposit. This makes it possible for deaf people to access captioned television programs without having to purchase a decoder.

- As the cost of special computers or print readers comes down, more employers are willing to purchase them for employees with alternate communication needs.

Welcome as these initiatives are, they are not nearly enough to meet the needs of people with impaired sight or hearing. If people are going to achieve independence through technology, government must find ways to expand its role as a provider of technological assistance.

The Alberta Aids to Daily Living (AADL) program in Alberta Health provides some aids to some people with hearing and vision disabilities, but there are gaps and inconsistencies.

- Hearing aids are available to people under 18 years and over 65 years of age, but not to those in between. Only one aid is provided for people over 65 but children may receive one aid per ear if needed.

- FM listening systems and auditory trainers may be provided to preschool children (up to age

5-1/2) but not to older children or adults.

- There is limited coverage for maintenance and repairs through AADL but batteries are not provided.

- CNIB has a contract with AADL to provide low vision aids such as magnifiers, Braille watches, and voice calculators to people in Alberta. Low cost items are quite readily available to those with assessed need, but high cost items are given to assessed applicants through a random draw because so few of these items can be provided within the budget allotment.

- Visual alarms, smoke detectors, telephone devices and TDD/TTYs to assist deaf and hard of hearing people are not available through AADL.

Finally, the focus of AADL, and the private sector as well, has been on the needs of people with vision and hearing difficulties that hinder communication. There is a much broader range of communication disabilities that can be alleviated through the use of technology. Many people are non-verbal as a result of neurological conditions like cerebral palsy, disease or damage to the voice mechanism, or various kinds of brain dysfunction. The numbers of these individuals in need of communication technology are small, but they have generally been ignored in existing programs.

Within the scope of this document, only government programs will be addressed.

Why Change is Needed

- Benefits under the AADL program are not the same for people who are hard of hearing and over 65 years of age as they are for those under 18 years of age, although their needs may be the same.
- People between the ages of 18 and 65 years do not have access to the same benefits as those under 18 or over 65, even though their needs may be the same.
- Providing needed equipment through a random draw system is inconsistent with any other benefits of the AADL program and fails to put priority on need.
- The need for low cost items to assist people with low vision is acknowledged through the new CNIB/AADL program. Low cost items to assist deaf people are not provided.
- Individuals who cannot speak receive no technological assistance at all to facilitate communication.
- Adequate training in the use of equipment is not provided to individuals.

Recommendation

5.1 Alberta Health will review the AADL program as it pertains to people with vision and hearing disabilities, and fund the program to remove the inconsistencies identified, i.e., age barriers, differential treatment of people with different disabilities. This review should be completed, and the program benefits adjusted, by 1993-94.

5.2 Alberta Health will expand the benefits under AADL to include communication technology to assist people with other disabilities that affect communication. This will require a strategy to consult with "expert consumers" in the community to create a list of benefits, develop priorities, and devise a plan to add benefits over time.

This plan should be completed in 1993-94.

Appendix 1

Proposed Policy on Communication Access

The following policy guidelines are suggested as a reasonable standard.

Three separate sections deal with publications, meetings and services. In each section there is a proposed policy statement and some guidelines for implementation. It is important to note that consultation with experts in the community who use alternate formats of communication will be necessary to fine tune the policy.

Government Publications/ Productions

The Government of Alberta and its departments and agencies will ensure that persons with print handicaps have access to provincial publications in the format of their choice. Such materials will be provided in a timely fashion and at a cost not to exceed that charged to persons who are not disabled.

All audio-visual productions intended for public viewing will be accompanied by captions (subtitles) and, where appropriate, descriptive narration to assist those with sight impairments to follow when only visual material is used.

Guidelines

1. **Means of access**

   Self-identification as print handicapped, or identification of need by an advocate or guardian, should be the only required justification to receive material in an alternate format. Government documents will contain a statement indicating what formats are available and where they can be obtained.

2. **Formats**

   The standard array of alternative formats includes large print (14 -18 point type), audiotape, and Braille. New technologies dictate that computer accessible format should be the standard since it allows easier production of Braille, large print and synthesized speech, as well as easy access for people with mobility impairments.

   A further consideration might be the videotaped production of a sign language interpreter signing the content of a long document. This would assist those Deaf people who have English as a second language.

   Finally, government libraries should arrange to make available the services of a reader upon request, with advanced notice.

3. **Timeliness**

Generally, government publications should be made available in alternate formats within a few days of the request. When it can be anticipated that there will be high demand for a publication by people with print handicaps, alternate formats should be prepared in advance. (Example: information on seniors' programs)

Public Meetings and Hearings

The Government of Alberta, its departments and agencies will ensure that public meetings and hearings which it sponsors are made accessible to persons with a disability.

Guidelines

1. **Meetings**

The policy covers meetings and hearings sponsored by government or its agents which are open to members of the public, and includes appointments with elected officials.

2. **Means of providing access**

The location for meetings and hearings will be accessible by people in wheelchairs, including access to washroom facilities. (While this is not a communication issue specifically, people cannot

communicate if they cannot attend.) Other physical considerations include good lighting for meeting rooms and the use of backlit projectors to avoid the need to dim lights.

Audio-visual presentations will need to accommodate people with alternate communication needs.

Notices of public meetings should indicate accessibility by use of the international wheelchair and ear symbols. However, since there is no common understanding about what level of accessibility accompanies the use of these symbols, it will be necessary to state what will be available, e.g., FM system, ASL interpreters.

It is reasonable to have some level of communication access available as a matter of course for public meetings, such as an FM system and large print documents. The nature of meetings for which greater levels of communication access (e.g., ASL, other communication facilitation) will be available as a matter of course needs to be defined. Assistance must always be provided with advanced notice, but advanced notice should not always be required.

A step approach is recommended to determine what the minimum level of assistance will be and at which meetings. For the first two years of this

policy (1993-1995), notices of public meetings will advertise the services available on request. By 1995-96 minimum standards will be developed stating what will be provided at which meetings without notice, and what will be provided with advanced notice.

Radio and television notices should also include a statement about access. Innovative media must be used to ensure better access to notices of meetings, possibly through television and computer bulletin boards and telephone information lines.

Upon determination of the type of access needed, sign language interpreters and/or oral communication facilitators, assistive listening devices or other communication assistance is to be arranged and paid for by the sponsoring body.

Government Services

The Government of Alberta, its departments, agencies and agents will ensure that people with alternate communication needs have access to government funded services, by providing the necessary communication assistance.

Within 5 years, communication access as described in this policy will become part of contract negotiations between government departments and community agencies that they fund.

Guidelines

1. **Services**

   Services include all those in which there may be lengthy, complex or confidential communications, and/or where clarity and accuracy are essential. Examples include counselling services; health services; communications in the justice system; interviews or other exchanges of information, particularly where understanding of procedures, rights and responsibilities is critical.

2. **Means of providing access**

   Appropriate supports will be paid for by the department, agency or agent whose service is being sought, and provided as requested to individuals seeking access to services. The range of supports available with advanced notice should include sign language interpreters and oral communication facilitators, intervenors (for deaf-blind), guides or readers, notetakers, and materials in alternate formats.

   All departments and agencies of government, including schools and hospitals, should ensure telephone access via TDD (telecommunications device for deaf). The availability of a TDD should be listed in telephone directories, next to the number, and training in the proper use of this equipment must be provided to staff.

This will be phased in over five years. The first priority must be direct service locations and regional offices. By 1998, all departments will have TDD access arranged in the best manner to meet the needs of the public.

Appendix 2

Glossary of Terms

The following material is intended to provide basic information about some of the terms used in the policy statements. It is meant to be educational, not to define limits, exclusions or inclusions. Information sources are noted in brackets.

Alternate communication needs:

Individuals who, because of age, level of literacy, mental or physical disability, are unable, without assistance, to fully access services which would otherwise be available to them, or to understand or be understood by service providers, have alternate communication needs. (Source: Manitoba government policy on access to government)

American Sign Language (ASL):

This is the language preferred and used by members of the Deaf community in North America. It has a unique grammatical structure that is different from English, and has recently been recognized by the governments of Alberta and Manitoba as an official language of Deaf people. In the French deaf population of Quebec, LSQ is used rather than ASL. It is not the same as ASL. (Source: Association of Visual Language Interpreters of Canada [AVLIC])

Assistive listening devices:

There are many devices to assist people who are hard of hearing. Hearing aids are the most commonly recognized devices but not all hard of hearing people can benefit from hearing aids, and they are not helpful where there is a lot of noise because the aids amplify all sounds.

Amplified telephones contain a device in the handset that allows the user to adjust the volume of sound being received. Individuals may have these in their homes but they are rarely found in public places, thus making public telephones inaccessible.

Wireless sound transmission systems exist that can provide hearing access to people who are hard of hearing. The magnetic loop system involves a cable that runs around the room. Speaking into a microphone fed into the loop allows the sound to be converted for use by listeners with hearing aids adapted for this feature.

In infrared systems, the signal from the microphone is picked up and converted into sound that can be heard through special receivers connected to some hearing aids or through special earphones. These last 2 systems can be used for classrooms or auditoriums where there is only one speaker. All speakers must use a microphone for listeners to benefit, something that is difficult

in group discussions. (Source: Calgary Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services, and report by Jerome Schein: "Facilitating Communication for Post-secondary Students with Impaired Hearing", 1990)

Audiotape:

Taped versions of printed text are produced in soundproof booths according to accepted standards of narration and format. This service can be purchased from CNIB in several Canadian cities. This format is useful for books that would typically be read from beginning to end, and for short text materials. It becomes less useful for reference documents that require the ability to pinpoint selected headings to find information. (Source: Canadian National Institute for the Blind [CNIB])

Braille:

This is a tactile reading system of raised dots on paper. Only about 4-5% of people with sight impairment can read Braille but those who do, rely on it. It provides the same flexibility as print does for sighted people and greatly enhances an individual's ability to scan material and refer back to specific sections. (Source: CNIB)

Closed captions:

These take the same form as open captions (subtitles) but are hidden from view unless a

decoder is used to activate the display. Deaf people must purchase decoders for television sets if they wish to watch captioned television programs, thereby incurring an additional expense. Others who may also benefit from captions are unlikely to know about or buy a decoder.

Deaf:

This term is usually used to describe individuals whose hearing is non-functional for the ordinary purposes of living and whose primary mode of communication is visual rather than auditory. Many use sign language as their major mode of communication, but people who become deafened in adulthood frequently do not learn sign language. Instead they rely on speech reading (sometimes called "lip" reading), which requires intense concentration and a clear view of the speaker. It also requires training to become skilled.

Deaf community:

This refers to those individuals who are Deaf or hard of hearing who identify with and participate in the language, society and culture of Deaf people, which is based on sign language. In written material, use of the upper case 'D' in the word Deaf indicates a reference to members of the Deaf community. (Source: Canadian Association of the Deaf)

Deaf Interpreter:

A Deaf interpreter is a native signer and a recognized member of the Deaf community. Deaf interpreters can be used in a number of settings, from one to one meetings, to platform interpreters or working with consumers who require specialized services. In the latter example, they may work with hearing interpreters, adapting the language in a form that is understandable to a "highly visual Deaf person", who may not have abilities in ASL or a known sign system. As with hearing interpreters, Deaf interpreters have specialized training and are governed by a code of ethics. (Source: AVLIC)

Descriptive narration:

Spoken sub-text that describes the visual components of a film, video or other visual presentation. For example, a procedure being demonstrated on film would need to be described in detail for a blind person. Similarly, written lists or points of information must also be spoken.

Hard of hearing:

This term is often used to describe hearing loss of any degree that interferes with verbal communication. There are many degrees and types of hearing loss, which means that each individual who is hard of hearing will have somewhat different needs. When addressing someone who is hard of hearing, it is important to speak clearly,

in a normal tone of voice (shouting does not help), and to face the individual who can then see the mouth movements of the speaker. Many, but not all, people who are hard of hearing use hearing aids to augment their ability to understand speech. Many of the devices and accommodations required by deaf people are also used by those who are hard of hearing (e.g., TDD). (Source: Calgary Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Information Booklet)

International symbols:

Figure 1

The stylized wheelchair (Figure 1) is the universally recognized symbol denoting wheelchair access. More recently the symbol for hearing access has been developed (Figure 2) and is used to indicate the availability of support for deaf and hard of hearing. If access is limited to only one of these groups (e.g., only interpreters, but not listening devices, will be provided) this limitation must be stated.

Figure 2

Intervenor:

A trained individual who acts as "the eyes and ears" of a person who has both hearing and sight losses (often referred to as deaf/blind, although most individuals have some sight and/or hearing). The amount of support required from an intervenor varies among individuals, depending on the degree of loss and individual coping skills - for some it is full time assistance that is required. (Source: CNIB)

Large print:

Print in 14 to 18 point type is readable by many people with reduced visual ability, including many seniors. Normal type for adult publications rarely exceeds 12 point. For reproducing from documents, photocopier enlargements using 11" X 17" paper are an adequate solution if the paper for both original and enlargement is white with black type and print appears on one side of the paper only. Double sided print tends to show through the paper, adding to visual problems. (Source: CNIB)

Learning disability:

Learning disability is a generic term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders due to identifiable or inferred central nervous system dysfunction. Such disorders may show up as delays in early development and/or difficulties in any of the following areas: attention, memory, reasoning, coordination, communicating, reading, writing, spelling, calculation, social competence, and emotional maturation. (Source: Learning Disabilities Association of Canada)

Open captions:

Print translations or subtitles of the spoken portion of a film or video sound track that appear across the bottom of the screen to assist those unable to hear the sound track with or without assistance. A verbatim translation is not usually

required, nor desired, since the meaning can easily be conveyed with fewer words than will be used by most speakers.

Oral (interpreter) communications facilitator:
A facilitator uses a combination of speech reading, mouthing and gestures to assist communication. This is sometimes used by hard of hearing people when no assistive listening device is available, or by deaf people who may have lost their hearing late in life and never learned sign language. (Source: AVLIC)

Print handicap:
Difficulty with, or inability to read, regular print materials because of sight impairment, physical, developmental or learning disability is considered to be a print handicap. For people with physical disability, the handicap may be limited to the ability to manipulate the book or paper, but the effect is the same as an inability to read or see. (Source: Manitoba government policy document on access to government)

Reader:
A reader is a person who reads printed text for individuals who are print handicapped. Often this is an informal service provided by friends or relatives, but libraries or public service offices may provide the service on a formal basis on request. The nature of libraries and their search

and cataloguing systems dictates the need for assistance in locating and perusing materials.

There are also technical devices that can translate print into voice or Braille. These devices are relatively expensive but offer a good alternative for larger libraries. (Source: CNIB)

Real time captioning:

This involves the translation of speech to text by a typist while a speaker is speaking. The text is displayed on a large screen to be read by the audience. For people with a good command of English, it is an alternative to sign language interpreters.

Sign (Visual) language interpreter:

This is a professionally trained individual who facilitates communication between hearing, hard of hearing and deaf people. The working languages in Canada are ASL, English, French and LSQ (French sign). The profession is guided by a code of ethics which has three major tenets: confidentiality, integrity and impartiality. Qualified interpreters have successfully completed a recognized training program or equivalent, and are working toward or hold certification in the field of interpretation. (Source: AVLIC)

TDD/TTY:

These are used to denote a telecommunications device that allows deaf people to use the telephone (Figure 3). TDD is commonly used after a telephone number to indicate the availability of the device. TTY is an older term, still preferred by many deaf people, from the days when teletype machines were used. Both sender and receiver must have a TDD to communicate directly. On modern machines, an LED screen displays the messages being sent and received. Some machines also offer a tape printout.

Figure 3

It is not necessary to have a telephone line dedicated to the TDD. The telephone handset can be connected to the TDD when a call is initiated. A relay operator can act as a go-between when a hearing person and a deaf person wish to communicate and the hearing person does not have a TDD. This is acceptable for short conversations, like making an appointment, but is awkward for long or confidential conversations.

Visual/sight impairment:

There are many types and degrees of visual loss. When described as a disability, it implies some degree of loss that cannot be corrected with lenses and may range from needing a magnifier

to see normal print to total inability to see objects. The needs of people with visual loss are as varied as the types and degrees of loss. Usually only those with the most severe losses use guide dogs and white canes for mobility.

Legally blind is a term that refers to a particular degree or type of visual loss but does not mean that the individual cannot see at all. Visual field problems like tunnel vision (loss of peripheral vision) can also result in being labelled legally blind. The term is used mainly as a criterion for determining who can receive benefits from certain services. Many people who are legally blind can function quite well with minimal accommodations. (Source: CNIB)

Appendix 3

Community Consultation Participants

Alberta Association of the Deaf
Alberta Chapter of Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf
Alberta Education, Materials Resource Centre
Alberta Information Network
Alberta School for the Deaf
Alberta School for the Deaf Advisory Board
Alberta School for the Deaf Community Council
Alberta Society for the Visually Impaired
Alberta Vocational Centre (Calgary), Special Needs Services
Alberta Vocational Centre (Calgary), Hearing Impaired Program
Alberta Vocational Centre (Edmonton), Support Services for the Physically Challenged
Association for the Hearing Handicapped
Association of Visual Language Interpreters of Canada
Association of Visual Language Interpreters of Southern Alberta
Calgary Academy
Calgary Action Group of the Disabled
Calgary Alternative Support Services Inc.
Calgary Board of Education

Calgary Catholic School Board (Itinerant Teachers for Deaf and Hard of Hearing and Visually Impaired)
Calgary Police Service, Chief Crowfoot Training Academy
Calgary Regional Advisory Committee
Canadian Council of the Blind
Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf Inc.
Canadian Hard of Hearing Association, Calgary Branch
Canadian National Institute for the Blind
City of Edmonton Advisory Board on Services for Persons with Disabilities
Counselling Services for the Hard of Hearing
Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services of Calgary
Disability Information Service of Canada
Edmonton Association of the Deaf
Edmonton Hard of Hearing Association for Adults
Education Response Centre, Student Support Services
Educational Consultants for the Sensory Impaired
Glenrose Rehabilitation Hospital, Assistive Device Service
Grant MacEwan Community College, Special Services to Students with Disabilities
Independent Living Resource Centre of Calgary
Lifestyle Coordination and Consultation Services
Mount Royal College, Special Services for the Disabled
National Access Awareness Week Committee (Alberta)

Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, Services to Disabled Students
Self Advocacy Network
Services to Persons with Disabilities, Family and Social Services
Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, Disabled Student Services
Transcribers Association
University of Alberta, David Peikoff Chair of Deafness Studies
University of Alberta, Disabled Student Support Services
University of Calgary, Disabled Student Services
Western Canadian Centre for Specialization in Deafness